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ABSTRACT

When the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) was mandated in Florida, a schedule of incremental increases in the required passing scores was legislated. The 1986 passing standards were scheduled to be increased in 1989. This change was projected to reduce by half the number of students admitted to upper-level status at Florida's colleges. A proposal was put forth by the Commissioner of Education to increase the standards on a more gradual basis. The two reports contained in this document analyze the potential impact of the various proposals on Broward Community College (BCC) students. The first report examines the passing rate of BCC students who took the CLAST in March 1989, utilizing 1986 standards, the Commissioner's proposed interim standards, and the standards originally scheduled for implementation in 1989. The report indicates that under 1986 standards the passing rate for BCC students was 79%. Under the originally proposed standards, this figure would drop to 36.5%, while under the Commissioner's proposal, the passing rate would be 58%. The second report examines the March 1986 CLAST scores by ethnic group. The report indicates that while 86% of BCC's White non-Hispanic students passed all four CLAST subtests, only 59% of the Black non-Hispanic students, 60% of the Hispanic students, and 44% of the Asian students did so. These figures dropped to 64%, 37%, 42%, and 28%, respectively, under the Commissioner's proposed standards and to 41%, 27%, 18%, and 12%, respectively, under the originally proposed 1989 standards. (JMC)

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THE PROJECTED IMPACT ON PASSING RATES OF PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CLAST PASSING STANDARDS

AND

INCREASED CLAST PASSING STANDARDS: THE IMPACT ON ETHNIC GROUPS

Institutional Research Report Abstracts Numbers RR89-15 and RR89-17

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The Projected Impact on Passing Rates
Of Proposed Changes to the CLAST Passing Standards

RR89-15 **July 18, 1989**

When the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) was mandated, a schedule of incremental increases in the required passing scores was legislated. The 1986 passing standards for the CLAST were scheduled to be increased in 1989. Although the Commissioner of Education had stated that she would pursue a rule change that would postpone the increases, to allow further study of the impact of such increases, during the 1989 legislative session it was announced that the higher standards would be implemented at the Fall 1989 administration of the CLAST examination. The 1989 standards would have the effect of reducing, by one half, the number of students permitted upper level status at Florida's learning institutions. The increase would effectively deny to nearly two-thirds of BCC students who sit for the CLAST, the Associate degree, or upper level status in the state university system. The severity of the impact such an increase would create has prompted the Commissioner of Education to propose more gradual increases in the passing standards for the computation and essay portions of the CLAST. The full increase to the 1989 standards would become effective in 1991, under Commissioner Castor's proposal.

This report examines the passing rate for BCC students who sat for the March 1989 administration of CLAST, utilizing the current 1986 standards, the proposed interim standards, and the original 1989 standards (to be phased in during 1990 and 1991). Data were taken from the BCC March 1989 CLAST results tape provided by the state, for first-time examinees only. Projected passing rates were determined by substituting the 1989 cut-off scores, and Commissioner Castor's proposed cut-off scores for the 1986 standards currently being used. The standards are as follows:

	1986	Interim 1989	(1991)
Computation	275	285	295
Reading	270	295	295
English	270	295	295
Essay	4	4	(1990) 5

While the projected statewide passing rate at 1989 standards was only 48%, these intermediate cut-off scores would increase the statewide passing rates from 48% to approximately 60%. However this is still a sharp decline from the 86% passing rate for first time test-takers in March of 1989, using the 1986 standards.

At BCC, the passing rate for students who sat for the CLAST in March of 1989 was 79%. This figure would drop to 36.5% using the original 1989 standards. Under Commissioner Castor's proposed revision, 58% of BCC's students would pass all four subtests on their first attempt (see Table 1). Effectively, the new proposal will cut in half the negative impact of the original 1989 standards (reducing BCC's passing rate to about 70%

of the previous year's passing rate). The individuals who previously would have passed all four subtests, under higher standards, will then join the ranks of those passing three, two, one or no subtests. As a result, the number of BCC students passing only three subtests would increase from 15%, as seen in the March 1989 results (under 1986 standards), to almost 29% under the 1989 standards. The Commissioner's proposed changes would yield a pass three rate of 22%. This group of examinees has in the past, when combined with those who pass four subtests, comprised what was called a "potential passing rate". That potential was a 94% passing rate in March 1989. It would have dropped to less than two-thirds given the 1989 standards, and would be just over 80% under the interim changes. This indicates that those who will no longer pass all four subtests would not just fall into the pass three category, under higher standards, but would fall into the lower passing categories as well.

A substantial increase in the number of students failing all four subtests will occur with either the original 1989 standards, or the interim standards. A negligible 0.1% of BCC students sitting for the March 1989 CLAST failed to pass any one of the subtests. If the 1989 cut-off scores are used, that figure jumps to nearly 7%. If the proposed interim cut-off scores are used, just over 2% of BCC examinees would have failed all four subtests. The number passing just one subtest would increase from the 1.1% seen in the March 1989, to almost 11% under the original 1989 standards. This increase would be moderated by the interim standards to 7.4%. It should be noted that those who fail three or four subtests have historically been less likely to retake the examination, and if they do so, more likely to fail again.

The passing rates for each subtest can be seen in the attached Table 1. The highest passing rates for BCC students who sat for the March 1989 CLAST were in the Reading and English subtests (97% and 96% respectively). Given the 1989 standards, one quarter of those who passed the reading, and one-third of those who passed the writing subtest, would fail. The standards for these two subtests would remain at the 1989 level, under the Commissioner's proposal. Interestingly, this will have the effect of making these two subtests those with the lowest passing rates, instead of the highest rates. The computation subtest had a passing rate of 90% at the March 1989 administration. The proposed cut-off score of 285 is an attempt to strike a middle ground between the current, and the 1989 standards. This would result in just over 83% passing, versus the two-thirds who would pass at a 295 cut-off score (to be placed in effect in 1991). The essay subtest, under the 1989 standards would yield a passing rate of 56%, in contrast to the actual 89% passing rate for the March 1989 CLAST. This standard would not take effect until 1990, under the interim plan.

Clearly, while the proposed interim increases in passing standards will yield fewer students who are allowed to progress to upper level coursework, they represent a reprieve from the 1989 standards. It appears that even small increases in passing standards dramatically affect the passing rate. Additionally, there has been little evidence to suggest that transfer students will perform better, or that graduates will be more successful, under increased CLAST standards. Although the scheduled increases in standards have been criticized by many, it appears that they will occur nevertheless. The effect on students will be nearly catastrophic, if dramatic increases in scores are not seen over the next two years. The impact will no doubt be greatest on the state university system, at an institutional level, seen in a decrease in the numbers of juniors and seniors. This lack of juniors and seniors, will have an impact on the number of declared majors, and ultimately will affect academic departments. The implications begin to broaden to many domains, when considered in their entirety.

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TABLE 1

CLAST Passing Rates at Broward Community College

Subtest Title	1986	Castor's	1989
Computation	90.00%	83.20%	66.00%
Reading	97.00%	81.00%	81.00%
Writing	96.00%	74.00%	74.00%
Essay	89.00%	89.00%	56.00%
# of Subtests Passed			
Pass 0	0.10%	2.20%	6.80%
Pass 1	1.10%	7.40%	10.70%
Pass 2	4.80%	10.00%	17.40%
Pass3	15.00%	22.10%	28.60%
Pass 4	79.00%	58.30%	36.50%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH
Report Abstract

Increased CLAST Passing Standards:
The Impact on Ethnic Groups

RR89-17 **August 2, 1989**

In a recent report issued by the Office of Institutional Research (RR89-15) the results of the March 1989 CLAST were used to project BCC's passing rates under either Commissioner Castor's proposed interim standards or the original 1989 standards. It was reported that 79% of BCC examinees passed all four subtests under the existing 1986 standards, but that only 58% would pass given the proposed interim standards, and a meager 36.5% would pass four subtests under the original 1989 standards (see Figure 1). Given the past discrepancies between ethnic group CLAST scores (RR88-08, RR88-10, RR88-16 and RR89-07), it is expected that the adverse effects of increased passing standards projected for the total student population will be experienced even more acutely by the minority student population.

The present report examines the March 1989 CLAST scores by ethnic group. The actual scores achieved on the March CLAST were obtained from magnetic tape media and analyzed utilizing all three sets of passing standards (1986, Interim and 1989). The number in each ethnic group who passed each subtest was then calculated as a percentage of the number in each ethnic category who sat for the examination.

The results of the analysis were in the expected direction, with fewer minority examinees passing all four subtests (Table 1). Whereas 86% of white non-Hispanic students passed all four subtests, only 59% of Black non-Hispanic, 60% of Hispanic, and 44% of Asian examinees did so. Using Castor's proposed interim standards these passing rates would drop to 64%, 37%, 42%, and 28% respectively. Under the more severe 1989 standards, the effects become more extreme. Forty-one percent of white non-Hispanic examinees, 27% of Hispanic examinees, a scant 18% of Black non-Hispanic examinees, and only 12% of Asian examinees would have passed all four subtests. These data are presented in graphic form in Figure 2.

The sharp decline in the overall passing rate is a reflection of the individual subtest passing rates. Under the original 1989 standards (scheduled to be in effect by 1991), the essay subtest would have the lowest passing rate in every ethnic group. While less than two-thirds of white non-Hispanic examinees would have passed, 38% of Hispanics, roughly one-third of Black non-Hispanics, and one-fifth of Asian examinees would have succeeded in passing the essay portion of the CLAST. The second lowest passing rate would have been in the computation portion, except for Asian examinees, who would continue to have the highest passing rate for this subtest.

The projections made in this study indicate that increased standards would not affect all ethnic groups equally. Almost 53% of the white non-Hispanic examinees who passed under the 1986 standards would no longer do so under the 1989 standards. Roughly 54% of the Hispanic examinees, and almost 70% of the Black non-Hispanic examinees who passed in March 1989 would not do so under the 1989 standards. If Castor's proposed interim standards are used, the trend is the same. Twenty-five percent of the white non-Hispanics, 30% of the Hispanics, and 37% of the Black non-Hispanics who were successful at the March administration of CLAST, would have failed at least one subtest given the interim standards. The existing discrepancies among ethnic groups in passing rates would clearly be increased.

Although the percentages listed above are clearly discouraging, the full magnitude of the consequences may be more clearly realized when the absolute numbers of students who would be affected are considered. The proposed interim increase would mean that instead of 609, 455 of the 708 white non-Hispanic examinees would have passed all four subtests. This number would drop to 290 under the full increase to 1989 standards. Where 43 of 73 Black non-Hispanics who passed the March 1989 CLAST, 27 would do so under the interim standards, and only 13 of the 73 would have passed under the full increase to the original 1989 standards. Of the 95 Hispanics who sat for the March CLAST, 57 passed. Under the proposed standards, 40 would pass, and if the full 1989 standards were in place, only 26 would have passed. Although 11 of the 25 Asian examinees passed under the 1986 standards, only three would have done so under 1989 standards. When all examinees are considered this equates to approximately 394 students who passed the March 1989 CLAST who would not have done under the 1989 standards. The consequences to the educational careers of these individuals may be severe.

Although the argument is raised that the CLAST may be retaken as many times as necessary, it is only administered three times a year. If students have enough personal financial resources, this will not pose a problem. They may retake the exam until they are successful, or even transfer to an out-of-state institution. Students having economic difficulties may not have this option. For these reasons, increased standards have implications for private as well as public universities, in addition to the hardships individual students will face. It remains to be seen whether vast numbers of students will persevere through one or more re-takes in order to obtain the Associate in Arts degree, or to achieve upper level status.

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Figure 1

BCC CLAST Results - March 1989
Passing Rates Under New Standards

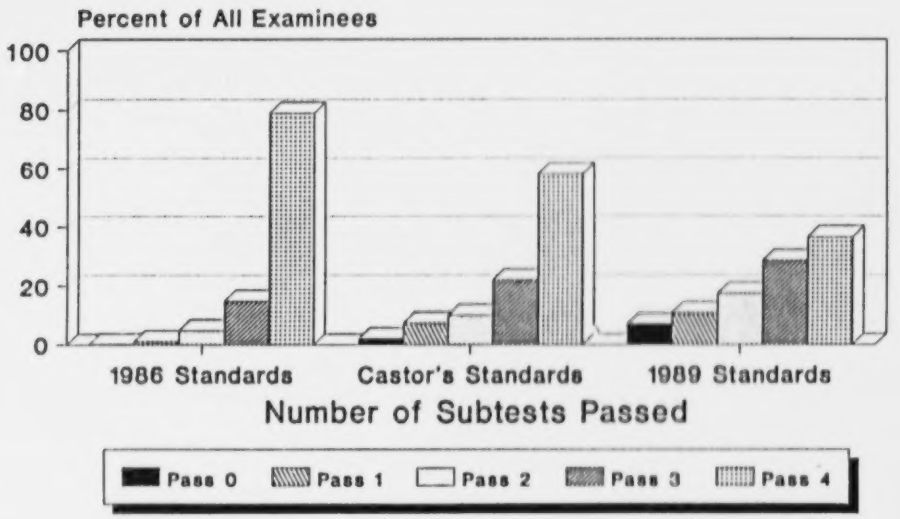
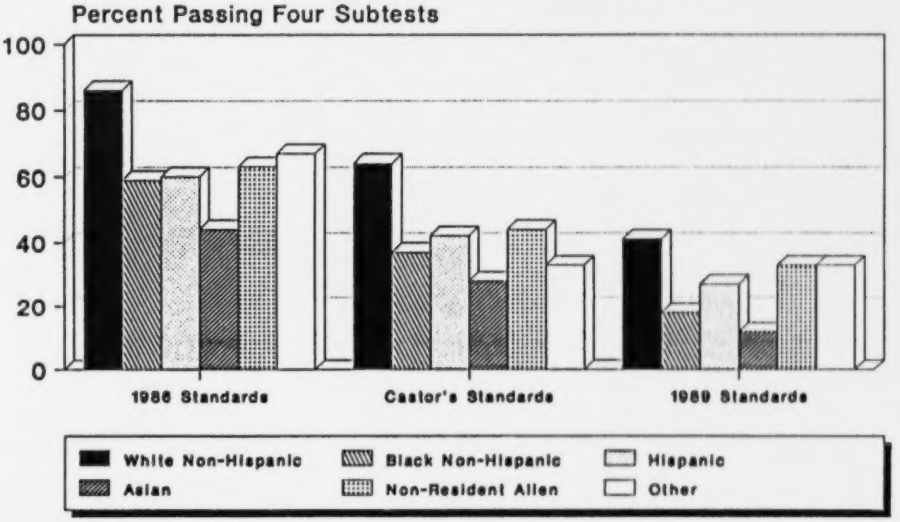


Figure 2

BCC CLAST Results - March 1989
Passing Rates by Ethnic Category



Note: No American Indians sat for this administration of CLAST

TABLE 1

BCC CLAST Results by Ethnic Category
March 1989 Administration

Under 1986 Standards							Under Castor's Proposed Standards							Under Original 1989 Standards						
		Percent Passing							Percent Passing							Percent Passing				
	N	0	1	2	3	4		N	0	1	2	3	4		N	0	1	2	3	4
White	708	0	1	3	11	86	White	708	1	5	7	22	64	White	708	4	9	16	30	41
Black	73	0	3	11	27	59	Black	73	8	19	18	18	37	Black	73	23	16	22	21	18
Hispanic	95	0	3	13	24	60	Hispanic	95	7	11	16	24	42	Hispanic	95	15	15	19	24	27
Asian	25	0	4	12	40	44	Asian	25	0	28	20	24	28	Asian	25	8	28	24	28	12
Non-resident Alien	16	0	0	6	31	63	N.R.A.	16	0	19	31	6	44	N.R.A.	16	19	13	25	19	25
Other	3	0	0	0	33	67	Other	3	0	0	33	33	33	Other	3	0	0	33	33	33
		Percent Passing							Percent Passing							Percent Passing				
	N	Math	Reading	Writing	Essay			N	Math	Reading	Writing	Essay			N	Math	Reading	Writing	Essay	
White	708	93	98	97	94		White	708	87	86	78	94		White	708	65	86	78	62	
Black	73	78	90	95	79		Black	73	62	62	53	79		Black	73	44	62	53	34	
Hispanic	95	79	97	87	78		Hispanic	95	66	74	65	78		Hispanic	95	58	74	65	38	
Asian	25	96	92	88	48		Asian	25	92	48	64	48		Asian	25	76	48	64	20	
Non-resident Alien	16	94	100	94	69		N.R.A.	16	88	50	69	69		N.R.A.	16	56	50	69	44	
Other	3	100	100	100	67		Other	3	67	67	100	67		Other	3	67	67	100	67	

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